

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

DreAun Johnson,	)	C/A No.: 1:22-77-SAL-SVH
	)	
Plaintiff,	)	
	)	
v.	)	
	)	
Greenville County Detention	)	ORDER AND NOTICE
Center Administrative Staff; Mr.	)	
Vondermoss, Assistant Jail	)	
Administrator; Mr. Hollister, Jail	)	
Administrator,	)	
	)	
Defendants.	)	
	)	

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DreAun Johnson (“Plaintiff”), proceeding pro se, filed this complaint alleging violations of his constitutional rights. He sues Greenville County Detention Center (“GCDC”) Administrative Staff, Assistant Jail Administrator Mr. Vondermoss, and Jail Administrator Mr. Hollister (collectively “Defendants”). Pursuant to the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(B) and Local Civ. Rule 73.02(B)(2)(e) (D.S.C.), the undersigned is authorized to review such complaints for relief and submit findings and recommendations to the district judge.

I. Factual and Procedural Background

Plaintiff alleges that on August 22, 2021, “an incident occurred” in his cell block that “lead to civil rights violation and jail rules were not honored or practiced by jail administration and staff admin . . . .” [ECF No. 1 at 14]. He

alleges “we as a whole w[ere] denied medical treatment.” *Id.* He claims there was a standoff that lasted 20 hours and that they were denied meals and electronics were turned off. *Id.* He alleges “tactical instruments” such as gas, pepper spray, and a “rifle with an unknown projectile” were used against him and other inmates. *Id.* Plaintiff was released from administrative segregation, but alleges he was unjustly sanctioned. *Id.*

## II. Discussion

### A. Standard of Review

Plaintiff filed his complaint pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915, which permits an indigent litigant to commence an action in federal court without prepaying the administrative costs of proceeding with the lawsuit. To protect against possible abuses of this privilege, the statute allows a district court to dismiss a case upon a finding that the action fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted or is frivolous or malicious. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i), (ii). A finding of frivolity can be made where the complaint lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact. *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 31 (1992). A claim based on a meritless legal theory may be dismissed sua sponte under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B). *See Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 327 (1989).

A complaint must contain “a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2). Pro se complaints are held to a less stringent standard than those drafted by

attorneys. *Gordon v. Leeke*, 574 F.2d 1147, 1151 (4th Cir. 1978). In evaluating a pro se complaint, the plaintiff's allegations are assumed to be true. *Fine v. City of N.Y.*, 529 F.2d 70, 74 (2d Cir. 1975). The mandated liberal construction afforded to pro se pleadings means that if the court can reasonably read the pleadings to state a valid claim on which the plaintiff could prevail, it should do so. A federal court is charged with liberally construing a complaint filed by a pro se litigant to allow the development of a potentially meritorious case. *Erickson v. Pardus*, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007).

The requirement of liberal construction does not mean that the court can ignore a clear failure in the pleading to allege facts that set forth a claim currently cognizable in a federal district court. *Weller v. Dep't of Soc. Servs.*, 901 F.2d 387, 390–91 (4th Cir. 1990). Although the court must liberally construe a pro se complaint, the United States Supreme Court has made it clear a plaintiff must do more than make conclusory statements to state a claim. *See Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 677–78 (2009); *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007). Rather, the complaint must contain sufficient factual matter, accepted as true, to state a claim that is plausible on its face, and the reviewing court need only accept as true the complaint's factual allegations, not its legal conclusions. *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678–79.

## B. Analysis

### 1. Insufficient Allegations

Plaintiff's complaint contains no factual allegations against the individual defendants. Plaintiff generally refers to "Administrators," but makes no specific allegations regarding how each defendant allegedly violated his constitutional rights. Therefore, Plaintiff has not alleged sufficient facts allowing the court to find any particular individual is potentially liable to him. A complaint must contain "a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief." Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2). Although the court must liberally construe a pro se complaint, the United States Supreme Court has made it clear that a plaintiff must do more than make conclusory statements to state a claim. *See Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 677–78 (2009); *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007). Rather, the complaint must contain sufficient factual matter, accepted as true, to state a claim that is plausible on its face, and the reviewing court need only accept as true the complaint's factual allegations, not its legal conclusions. *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678–79.

### 2. GCDC Administrative Staff is not a "Person"

To state a plausible claim for relief under 42 U.S.C. § 1983,<sup>1</sup> an aggrieved party must sufficiently allege that he was injured by "the deprivation of any

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<sup>1</sup> Plaintiff's complaint is before this court pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Section

[of his or her] rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the [United States] Constitution and laws” by a “person” acting “under color of state law.” *See* 42 U.S.C. § 1983; *see generally* 5 Charles Alan Wright & Arthur R. Miller, *Federal Practice and Procedure* § 1230 (3d ed. 2014). Only “persons” may act under color of state law; therefore, a defendant in a § 1983 action must qualify as a “person.” Groups of individuals in a building do not qualify as a “person” who can act under color of state law for purposes of § 1983. *See Kane v. Beaufort Cty Sheriffs Dep’t*, C/A No. 9:14-508-RMG, 2015 WL 404570, at \*6 n.2 (D.S.C. Jan. 29, 2015) (noting that “[a] department is not a person subject to suit under § 1983”). Here, GCDC Administrative Staff is not considered a “person” subject to suit under § 1983, and this defendant is subject to summary dismissal.

#### NOTICE CONCERNING AMENDMENT

Plaintiff may attempt to correct the defects in his complaint by filing an amended complaint by **February 3, 2022**, along with any appropriate service documents. Plaintiff is reminded an amended complaint replaces the original complaint and should be complete in itself. *See Young v. City of Mount Ranier*, 238 F.3d 567, 572 (4th Cir. 2001) (“As a general rule, an amended pleading

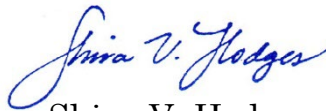
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1983 is the procedural mechanism through which Congress provided a private civil cause of action based on allegations of federal constitutional violations by persons acting under color of state law. The purpose of § 1983 is to deter state actors from using badge of their authority to deprive individuals of their *federally guaranteed* rights and to provide relief to victims if such deterrence fails.

ordinarily supersedes the original and renders it of no legal effect.”) (citation and internal quotation marks omitted). If Plaintiff files an amended complaint, the undersigned will conduct screening of the amended complaint pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915A. If Plaintiff fails to file an amended complaint or fails to cure the deficiencies identified above, the undersigned will recommend to the district court that the claims specified above be dismissed without leave for further amendment.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

January 13, 2022  
Columbia, South Carolina



Shiva V. Hodges  
United States Magistrate Judge